



Education Today

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In today's program we talked about a series of school changes that have, in my view, made schools worse rather than better. The corporate or political individuals who influenced these changes talk a lot about using "evidence" to determine policy. In fact, evidence does not support what they are doing!!

The basis for the argument that these are "corporate-influenced" reforms lies originally in the role of the National Business Roundtable which, in 1989, set out its blueprint for creating education that was based on "standards" and "outcomes." A recent article discussing this influences was written by the Dean of the Schools of Education at the University of San Francisco, Kevin Kumashiro and is available at <http://www.aaup.org/article/when-billionaires-become-educational-experts#.VCatPxbxg70>

There are many elements to these corporate-influenced changes. I have outlined four of the elements below, along with some relevant evidence. I do not, in general, support standardized test scores as the basis for drawing conclusions about education. However, insistence that everything be measured by test scores is a fundamental principal of corporate-influenced education reform. Therefore, I have used what test scores indicate about their success or lack of it.

What the evidence says about a series of corporate-influenced reforms:

1. Has corporate-influenced change reduced the achievement gap?

The "No Child Left Behind" federal law was accepted by many individuals because of the claim that it would reduce or end the "achievement gap" between students of different ethnicities. In fact this test score gap has actually stayed the same or increased since the corporate reformers have been pursuing their educational policies.

In the period between 1973 and 1990 (BEFORE these corporate-influenced reforms were introduced) the achievement gap did decrease. Since corporate-oriented reform the "achievement gap" has stayed the same or gotten worse. The Business Roundtable initiatives began in 1989; No Child Left Behind began in 2001. Some of the statistics are available here.

http://www.youthlaw.org/publications/yln/2009/april_june_2009/no_child_left_behind_fails_to_close_the_achievement_gap/

2. Has corporate-influenced change improved U.S. Performance in Relation to Other Countries

Corporate-influenced reformers claimed that their reforms would improve U.S. performance relative to other countries. Has this been the case?

No. The U.S. is the wealthiest country in the world and by international test score comparisons, it has continued to score in the middle of other industrialized countries. The top-ranked country, Finland, has many policies that are exactly the opposite of what U.S. corporate-reformers have pushed. See list of Finnish policies at the end (**)

3. Has the Policy of Holding Students Back in the Same Grade Based on Test Scores Improved their Educational Performance

Corporate-influenced policy makers have pursued policies which force students to stay in the same grade if they do not pass a certain mark on tests. What is the result? The evidence from decades of studies is clear. It does not help students to be retained in the same grade and it and actually makes it more likely that they will drop out of school!!

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/05/21/32stipek.h33.html>

Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) studied the effects of the Chicago Public Schools policy that bases promotion in grades 3, 6, and 8 on standardized test scores. 3rd graders struggled during the repeated year, had higher rates of special education placement, and two years later showed no advantage over those who had been promoted. 6th graders who were retained had lower achievement growth than similar students who were not retained.

Students who drop out are five times more likely to have been retained than those who graduate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Using data from Chicago, Jacob and Lefgren (2007) concluded that students retained in 8th grade were more likely to drop out than their peers”

4. Does Closing Schools Improve School Districts or Students in Terms of Cost or Available Education

This web site debunks many of the arguments made in support of closing schools.

<http://www.otlcampaign.org/blog/2013/07/09/debunking-myths-school-closures>

**The Policies of Finnish Schools:

(The best book on this subject is by Pasi Sahlberg, *Finnish Lessons*.)

In Finland:

- Students have light homework loads.
- Finnish schools do not have classes for gifted students.
- Finland uses very little standardized testing.
- Children do not start school until age 7.
- Finland has a comprehensive preschool program that emphasizes "self-reflection" and socializing, not academics. There is no reading instruction in Finnish pre-schools.
- Grades are not given until high school, and even then, class rankings are not compiled.
- * Finland has social policies which provide health care and social services for all.
- Becoming a teacher in Finland is competitive, and teachers have a master's degree. Teaching is a high-status profession. (Teacher salaries are similar to teacher salaries in the U.S., however.)
- Students pursue academic or vocational tracks during the last three years of high school. About 50% go into each track. However, they are prepared for participation in either track and may move from one to the other.
- Diagnostic testing (not standardized testing) of students is used frequently. If a student is in need of extra help, intensive intervention is provided.
- Groups of teachers visit each other's classes to observe their colleagues at work. Teachers also get one afternoon per week for professional development.
- School funding is higher for the middle school years, the years when children are most in danger of dropping out.
- College is free in Finland.